ON THE RIM OF THE WORLD

J. Paterson-Smyth

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ON THE RIM OF THE WORLD

LOOKING OUT OVER THE WALL

BY

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PREFACE

THE purpose of this little book is to offer assurance and consolation to that wistful crowd who stand, as it were, on the Rim of the World looking out through the earth mists toward that land where their beloved have gone. For that assurance and consolation I would lead them to their Bible to study the teaching of those who know, to hearken when the Christ and the men who followed with Him were looking out over the wall.

But I desire to offer them some little guidance too. For amongst them are some who are puzzled or attracted by modern Spiritualism and need help in thinking.

Perhaps one may help who has tried to study Spiritualism sympathetically with open mind, and who would point them away from it to the saner teaching in which the Lord and His apostles look beyond the earth-mists and

give us glimpses at least of the truer vision into the mysteries of that Land Unseen.

I have incorporated here some of the prominent thoughts in my larger book, "The Gospel of the Hereafter."

J. P. S.

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I "What We Shall Be—"

I AM thinking of the great multitude that no man can number of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues who have passed away out of this life of earth into the great adventure of the Hereafter.

I am thinking of the loving hearts reaching out after them standing pathetically on the rim of the world looking out over the wall. The earth-mists hide from them that spirit land. They cannot map out its continents and shores. No gleam of the golden cities has ever touched their eyes, but they believe or at least hope that out beyond the mists is a land where their beloved dwell.

And I think, too, of another crowd, equally loving and not all unbelievers, but who never come to peer over the wall. We are a strangely dull people, we humans. An unthinking crowd at the gate of unutterable mysteries. There are wondrous things ahead, but the people do not know it. There is no death, but the people do not believe it. Human life is the most exciting, romantic adventure in the universe, going on stage after

stage till we are older than Methuselah and then on again through the infinite eternities, and yet men pass into the Unseen as stupidly as the caterpillar on the cabbage-leaf, without curiosity or joy or wonder or excitement about the boundless career ahead.

And so, instead of the thrill of coming adventure there is the grey monotony of aged lives drawing near the close, and the pain of bereavement becomes blank desolation, and that upward, forward look is lost which helps to draw the world nearer to God.

It was so different in early days, when the world was younger, when Christ's revelation was fresh. Look at St. John, fourscore years and ten, like an eager boy looking out into the Great Adventure: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and IT DOTH NOT YET APPEAR WHAT WE SHALL BE."

What we shall be! What we shall be! Is not that the chief delight of being young? Guessing and hoping and wondering what we shall be!

The dreariest thing in life is dulness—monotony. The brightest thing in life is outlook—vision. And God has given us that. Like St. John, we too can stand on the rim of the world and look out over the wall.

Life is full of latent possibilities—of outlook, of romance, of exciting futures. God has made it so, if we could only see it. God's world of nature has its continuous progress, its ever new and fascinating stages. God's caterpillars in their next stage are going to be soaring butterflies—God's acorns are to become mighty oaks—God's dry little seeds in the granary to-day will in autumn be alive in the waving harvests. God's world of nature is full of romantic possibilities, and God's world of men is infinitely more so, and one of life's delights is to know it and look forward to it, guessing what we shall be. Outlook. Vision. That is what gives zest to life. That is what we need to make life bright and beautiful.

I see a group of small boys sitting at their play, and their eyes are bright, looking into the future. They are going to be soldiers, and sailors, and circus-riders, and travellers, and all sorts of things. Because they are boys with the enthusiasms of boyhood, they may be anything. All the possibilities of boyhood belong to them. It doth not yet appear what they shall be, but it is delightful to look forward and speculate about it.

I see them again a dozen years later. They

are starting in life, just left college, young doctors and lawyers and clergy and business men—still with their visions and dreams of the future. It doth not yet appear what they shall be, but because they are young men, all that belongs to young manhood lies before them, as they look forward in their day-dreams. What countries they shall live in, and what girl they shall marry, and what positions and what work, and what excitements, and what pleasure lie before them. Ah, it is delightful to be young, realising the possibilities in front—dreaming of what we shall be.

I see a crowd of older people, men and women, dull, uninterested. "We are no longer young," they say; "we are middle-aged or elderly. And we have ceased looking forward. We have lost the vision. We have not become as great as we expected, or as good as we expected. We are fairly comfortable. We have not much to complain of. But life is a bit dull. The path is a bit monotonous now. We have traversed most of it. We can see to the end, there are no more romantic possibilities to make life exciting, no more visions of 'what we shall be.'"

Don't believe it! Not a word of it. The visions are there all right. Look out over

the wall. This life of yours is only one of the stages in your career, and not the first stage either. The first came to you, silent, unconscious, "where the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child." There you grew and developed for the next move forward. One day came the crisis of birth, and you passed into the second stage, the training stage for life and for God. Then through a new crisis you pass on again to new adventures. For God has revealed that what you call death, the end of this career, is but birth into a new and more wondrous career which again passes you forward into still nobler adventures, and that again, perhaps—who knows? Who shall fix the limit?

Nay, you are not elderly. You are not middle-aged. These are but comparative terms. A house-fly is elderly in twenty-four hours. An oak-tree is young after a hundred years. And you, children of eternity, with ages before you—you are not even one-year-old babies in the light of your great future.

So you see why the old apostle of Ephesus did not feel aged or elderly, why he looked out like an eager boy into the adventure before him. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, but we don't know yet what we shall be." Ay, we don't know yet. No more than

did the small boys laughing in their play and going to be soldiers and sailors and wonderful people. We don't know yet. But it is all before us. And it is all going to be good because it is in the Father's presence.

So I bid my readers do what I sometimes do myself, look out into the void and guess like the children what you shall be when you are older than Methuselah.

Shake off the dulness and monotony from your life. Don't talk as if old or middle-aged any more. Be children again in the presence of the Father, and with happy child-hearts keep guessing what you shall be.

II

Listening Across the Void

TWO groups stand to-day on the Rim of the World looking out over the wall.

One group, a small one, consists of the adherents of Spiritualism. (I do not like its name. It should rather be called "Spiritism." The word "spiritual" has with most of us a higher connotation.)

Theirs is a startling fascinating claim, the possibility of communication with the other world. Naturally it has caused considerable interest, especially in the terrible bereavements after the War. In some small degree it attracts church people but mainly the classes who have been casual in religious observances, who have never made their own the Christian teaching about life beyond the grave. Though a small group, they are too prominent to be ignored in any picture of that crowd gazing out over the wall.

No responsible teacher has a right to make pronouncements approving or condemning any movement which he has not himself honestly

studied. I have tried for some years to study with open mind the phenomena of Spiritism. I have had experiences interesting, startling, puzzling, perplexing, as regards results in knowledge disappointing on the whole. But experiences which have set me thinking deeply. I have read pretty widely its voluminous literature. Rather profitless reading. Writers on the one hand too easily credulous, on the other hand too obstinately incredulous or determined to explain everything by evil agencies —relieved by the few on both sides of candid mind who could estimate evidence wisely and reasonably.

So far, the result of my thinking is this: not to condemn Spiritism peering through the earth-mists into another world, but to place it in its lower subordinate position, to warn people of its dangers, and to set opposite it that higher "Spiritualism" beyond the mists, which Christianity reveals and which ought to be known and is not known as it should be by the people of a Christian land.

Let us be quite frank about this cult of Spiritism. The Church unhappily has abandoned to it an enquiry which she should have made her own. And Spiritism has badly failed. It has grave faults and dangers. It

is exploited by charlatans and vulgarised by frivolous crowds. It has belittled that other life, making it seem petty and trivial, making it little more than an extension of this poor earth-life. Its current teaching has soiled the beauty and mystery and dignity of death as represented by our Lord. Nay, it almost seems to ignore that Lord Himself. It has built on very insufficient foundations a false and dangerous system of beliefs. Not to speak of the fact that the indiscriminate and undisciplined indulgence of its activities may gravely injure character and health.

In the hands of people largely careless and irreverent Spiritism is having mischievous results and the leaders of the Church are wise and right in their warnings to Christian people.

This is a stern indictment of Spiritism. Stern, too, should be the blame to the Christian Church which has abandoned to such hands a question that concerned her closely and then because of the discredit thus brought upon it has weakly run away from the question altogether. The question belonged to Christianity. It is a question of importance and of fascinating interest:

Has the life beyond given any clear evi-

dence of its existence? Do voices ever come across the void?

Note carefully that this is a simple question of fact. No prejudice against any "ism" should affect its discussion. It has nothing to do with false theories that may result from it. It belongs not to Spiritists but to all humanity. It is not a question of theology, though its answers may affect theology. It is a plain, scientific problem like that of the X rays or wireless telegraphy. It may be a very difficult question to answer. But some attempt should have been made to answer it. And it must be answered scientifically by observation and experiment. It cannot be answered any other way.

Note also that it is not a question to be lightly laughed out of court. Thoughtful men are seriously discussing it. Students of psychical science have been studying it for years. Some prominent thinkers would answer it in the affirmative. Few would venture positively to assert the negative. Even the recent great Council of Anglican Bishops at Lambeth says in its cautious calm judicial pronouncement on the question, "there are phenomena which seem to support that hypothesis. . . . We cannot dismiss the possibility of it."

Surely even that bare possibility is somewhat exciting. For if ever it should rise beyond mere possibility, think what it would mean in deepened conviction of the reality of survival after death. We stand before the stage of the Invisible World with the curtain tight drawn, seeking in the Bible some knowledge of our departed in that mysterious life beyond. Think what it would mean if suddenly some accident should lift for a few inches a corner of the curtain just enough to shew the feet of living people moving within —just that and no more—and that just for a moment. Realise the force of the startling conviction: "There are living people within!" Think of the new delightful reality in our study. That Bible would never be just the same again.

Will the Church ever prayerfully face the question, calling to her aid the best men within her border? The subject deserves more serious scientific consideration than it has received. For science, as Lord Kelvin said, is bound to face fearlessly every problem that can fairly be presented to it. Psychical science has spread itself over too large a field. We need long patient study concentrated on this field alone, to judge if it can be explained away

as fraud or delusion and to judge if it be real what possibilities are in it. We need little bands of men scientifically trained in weighing evidence, not prejudiced nor indifferent, not credulous nor incredulous—men of honest, open mind and especially religious men in the broadest sense of the word who would face the enquiry honestly and solemnly in the name of the God of truth.

Shall we thus some day come to the lifting of the corner of the curtain? The evidence points that way. There is a growing impression in spite of often-proved fraud and trickery that all is by no means fraud and trickery, that suggested hypotheses such as telepathy or hypnotism cannot explain all the phenomena—that there is some reality behind —that mysterious voices of some kind do come across the void. Often perplexing, puzzling, disappointing voices. "It is as when one sits in his little amateur wireless station listening for wandering flashes from the ships at sea. Now and then he hears cross currents crackling through the air from amateurs like himself. There are many of them 'listening in,' and some of them he suspects sending spurious messages." Sometimes he gets a message clear and distinct, but whether from

the sea or land he cannot certainly know. But he feels there is something there.

If ever there should be proved unquestionably any lifting of the curtain, even the rarest certain happening of voices from the other side, Christian people should accept it reverently and thankfully as a confirmation of their beliefs. And accept it only for what it is worth—no more. They must dissociate it from "isms," Spiritism or other, which would build unwarranted theories upon it.

Be it noted that this is the attitude of the Council of Bishops which I have referred to. Their pronouncement is mainly directed against the false teachings of Spiritism. In admitting the possibility of the lifting of the curtain they dissociate it altogether from such false teachings founded on the belief in it. Here is the final sentence in their report:

"It is possible that we may be on the threshold of a new science which will by another method of approach confirm in us the assurance of a world behind and beyond the world we see and of something within us by which we are in contact with it. We could never presume to set a limit to means which God may use to bring man to the realization of spiritual life. But there is nothing in the cult (spiritism) erected on this science which enhances, there is much indeed which obscures, the meaning of that other world and our relation to it as unfolded in the gospel of Christ."

Probably some good people will censure what I have here said. But I must write frankly, if at all. I am writing for that wistful crowd gazing out into the Unseen not only to warn them against the risks of Spiritism but also to share with them a hope which I cherish myself that some day may come to them through the Christian Church a startling confirmation of their cherished beliefs. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. It is not for us to turn away from any evidence that sets men thinking. It is not for us to limit what God may do for us in concession to our weakness if it should be His holy will.

The chief evil of Spiritism in the mind of thoughtful religious people is that it seems to live on a low plane. It tends to lower our thoughts of the great solemn World of the Dead. It is a common remark that the bulk of what profess to be communications from the Unseen are petty and trivial. No doubt these trivial things may be the most convincing proofs of identification, which is chiefly what communicators have in view. No doubt, too, that one who meets friends for a moment in this startling way is not likely to begin by talking of his most sacred feelings.

But perhaps there is a wider explanation why the communications of Spiritism tend to lower our thoughts of that life. If a stranger from another planet should seek to know the trend of religious life on earth, how misleading it would be to judge from the chance talk of an ordinary crowd. The best exponents of Spiritism, men like Sir William Barrett, believe that it can get in touch only with those on the earth border, who have not long died —at any rate, only with those who are still attracted towards the world they have left by their interest in still living friends. They are but comparative beginners in that life, the rearguard as to time of the advancing host, the outer fringe on the earthward side.

There are faithful souls in that rearguard of the host, seldom sought, one fears in public seances. And surely they are the minority. The bulk will be, as in this world, the careless crowd not yet at least risen to any higher stage. Theirs are the voices that will most be heard by those who "listen in" at that half-open door, voices still careless, trivial, of the earth earthy. All the more when the listeners are of the same type themselves. For like seems to attract like.

In any case these listeners are not seeking religious knowledge. They are, naturally, ab-

sorbed in seeking some evidence that their friends are alive and happy.

May not this be part of the reason why the atmosphere suggested by Spiritism seems in the main unworthy of that life? We look for deepening spirituality and joyous progress into closer fellowship with the Divine—and the general impression we get is the mere thought of having a good time.

That is the chief danger of Spiritism, that it is likely to be very misleading. If, judging from chance voices of the crowd on the outer fringe, it should suggest a whole world beyond little higher than this poor world it is likely to degrade our whole thought of the life hereafter.

It need not do this. If it would be wise and humble and docile and reverent—if it would realise its position as a mere tyro just groping at the fringe of the Unseen. Even on its own claims up to this, at any rate, it has only come to the earth border, lifting a little corner of the curtain, enough to see that there are live people beyond, people with memory and affection and interest in the lives left behind them on earth. If its results be recognised as unquestionable it will certainly prove survival after death. And that is a very great

gain. We are so constituted that no teaching, even of the Bible itself, can be so impressive and convincing as one single undoubted experience of "the touch of a vanished hand."

But mere survival after death is a very poor thing compared with the splendid Immortality and joyous upward Progress and increasing Fellowship with God which the Christian revelation bids us look forward to.

Spiritism (granting its reality) touches but the fringe of the Unexplored Country. To the Lord of that Country Himself we owe any passing glimpses of the farther land and the sunlit heights and the best of

"The lovely secrets told to those who die."

Therefore, even those who believe most in its reality should recognise the grave need for at least modesty and diffidence on the part of Spiritism. It has not got beyond the rudiments of knowledge. Maybe it will some day. More probably it will not. For it has serious limitations, some of which I have mentioned. Add to this the constant danger of fraud and the fact that its communications are confessedly vitiated by the personal element in the medium. With all these limitations it surely becomes Spiritism to be at least humble and modest and not set itself up as a new religion

or a new revelation. If it would reverently keep in touch with Christian teaching about the Unseen each might perhaps help to confirm or elucidate the other. If it set up as an exponent of life in the Unseen the results must be disastrous.

III *Learning from Those Who Know*

NOW turn to the other group, men with the Christian revelation in their hands, with their eyes on that other world, searching the thoughts of those who could see it truly and not trusting themselves to chance, perplexing voices, drawing near to listen when the Christ and the men who learned from Him were looking out over the wall. There is a difference in their outlook.

The Spiritist group is like a tourist startled and fascinated by the unexpected vision of a land unknown, delightedly catching momentary glimpses through the mists of its OUTER LIFE, its cloud-like scenery, its shadowy crowds in which are faces that he seems to know.

This other group is equally fascinated. But it looks farther and deeper. Its thoughts are rather of the INNER LIFE of that land beyond the mists. To the poor humble servant of Christ his inner life is the supreme thing, his gratitude and trust, his personal devotion, his longing to grow nobler and nearer to the

Divine. This is his central life. He feels that if there be growth and progress for his beloved in the Unseen this must be the central line of its development.

And his Bible confirms that view. What few glimpses it brings of the Unseen suggest always a life not only vivid and conscious, but a life where nobleness of character is the central thought, a life of restful, grateful, loving, happy progress towards God.

And here let me emphasise the duty of the Church, especially in these pathetic days of widespread bereavement after the War, the duty of teaching more fully what has been given her to teach of that life of the spirit-world. Though the Bible is reticent about that spirit-world it has very much to teach which is not being taught. And it is a very fascinating study. All touch with the Unseen must ever be fascinating to us on this side, and we cannot wonder that many should seek it through Spiritism if they are not directed to the truer vision which God has given us.

The Bible keeps that other world prominently before us. Through all the teachings of our Lord runs the thought of another world encircling this world of time as the sea encircles the land. In the parable of Dives,

of the Rich Fool, the Virgins, the Talents, everywhere the issues lead up to the World Beyond. He keeps lifting the curtain for glimpses of a farther horizon, giving the true perspective to human life by seeing us always in a wide, spacious Universe where both worlds are one. He tells of the nearness of that world and that it is an infinitely kindly, friendly world, deeply interested in this world. He tells of its joy over one sinner that repents on earth, of the earth-children's guardian angels "always beholding the face of the Father which is in Heaven." He tells of Abraham in that Unseen Life rejoicing to see His day here, so interested is that world in ours. In the story of the Transfiguration Moses and Elijah, two of the great old-world saints, come out from the spirit-land to meet their Lord and speak "of His decease which He should accomplish in Jerusalem," suggesting surely the deep absorbing interest which they and their great comrades within the Veil were taking in the earthly mission of their Lord.

Whatever we may think of the phenomena of modern spiritualism there can be no question of the Spiritualism high and true which surrounds the life of Jesus in the Gospels. From the spirit crowd which hailed His birth on the Bethlehem plains down to the "two

men in white apparel" who appeared at His Ascension we have repeated incursions from another world, voices, appearances, indications not to be questioned of a sphere outside our own deeply interested in our world here.

We are taught that that world is around us still. It is not visible to us who look out over the wall. We cannot map out its continents and shores. No gleam of its golden cities has ever touched our eyes. Perhaps it is only because the light is wrong, because the glare of this world obscures it. Just as happens every day when the glare of the sunlight, revealing to us every little flower and leaf and insect, shuts out from us the starry universe which stands forth in the midnight sky. The light is wrong for it. If we never got darkness to correct our vision we might never believe in that starry world at all. Maybe only the closing of our eyes in the darkness of death will put us in the right light for seeing that spirit land. But we know that it is around us just the same as it so manifestly was in the life of Jesus.

Thus the men of earliest Christian days thought about the spirit world. Think of that bold picture in the Epistle to the Hebrews to encourage us in our Christian race. "We are compassed about with a great cloud of wit-

nesses," that long list of the old heroes of the Faith which the writer has just enumerated crowding, as it were, the galleries of their world to watch the struggles of their descendants on earth, like the "old boys" at a great school anniversary coming back to watch the boys in the contests which they themselves had taken part in forty years ago. And the picture deepens in solemnity later on as he bids them look up "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." [1]

Thus do Christian men seek the deeper knowledge of life at the other side, searching the thoughts of those who could see it truly, drawing near to listen when the Christ and the men who learned from Him were looking out over the wall.

[1] Heb. xii., 1, 22, 23.

IV

Death and Afterwards

WHAT has the Christian Church to teach for the helping of that crowd on the rim of the world looking out over the wall?

Here is a desolate mother mourning her dead. Kindly, sympathetic friends offer what comfort they can, usually vague conventional phrases that do not grip. Alas! it does not help much.

> "Console if you will, I can bear it.
> 'Tis a kindly wasting of breath.
> But not all the talking since Adam
> Can make death to be other than death."

What is the full message of the Church of Christ in the matter? Has she any further word from her Master to the world "to make death to be other than death"? Ay, has she! Listen to it. That there is no death. That what seems to us death is only birth into a larger, fuller life with nobler opportunities, with more developed powers. That as the baby's eyes open from the darkness of the womb to sunlight upon this earth, so do the

eyes that close in the darkness of death open upon "a light that never was on sea or land."

How can I put before you in the short limit of these pages the message of our holy religion about those who die? You must think hard. You must follow closely.

First note the Bible's sharp distinction between ME and the body which I temporarily inhabit. It is but my "earthly tabernacle to be dissolved" one day to be replaced by a "house not made with hands eternal in the heavens."

Grip that thought first. Concentrate your attention on the self within you—the mysterious, spiritual being that you call "I"—that real self which stands behind the body looking out now through the windows of your eyes, receiving messages through the portals of your ears; which is not the body, but owns and uses the body; which is not the brain, but works through the brain, its instrument; which is not the train of thoughts and feelings and emotions, but experiences these thoughts and feelings and emotions.

Realise that this mysterious spiritual "I" within is the real man himself—that the body is only his outward garment, continually being woven by him out of certain chemical sub-

stances. That this body is continually changing its substance like the rainbow in the sky or the eddy in the river. That the body you have to-day is no more the body of five years ago than the fire on your hearth to-night is the same that was there this morning. I have had a dozen different bodies since I was born. I am all the time laying them aside like the old clothes that I have done with. But "I" am the same still.

Realise that my brain is only the instrument played on by "me," who stand behind it. That the particles of my brain are always changing. That I have had a dozen brains since I was born, so far as its material particles are concerned. Yet memory insists that I am still the same "I" in spite of all these changes of brain, and I can remember what I said and did with those old vanished brains of mine twenty and thirty years ago.

Realise that "I" am not the thoughts and feelings and emotions. They are mine. They are not Me. They are only passing phases of my being. They are always changing. Everything around is changing. I remain the same being always. Nothing else in the universe remains the same—except God. God and "I."

Realise especially the continuity of personal identity in this "I," this self within, in spite

of all bodily changes. Not a particle remains of the brain or nerves or tongue or eyes or hands or feet with which "I" did a good or evil deed twenty years ago, but it is absolutely impossible for me to doubt that it was "I" who did it, that "I" to-day deserve the praise or blame which is due to it.

Now, has this helped you even a little to think of this mysterious, supernatural personal self and to think of it apart from the perishable body, apart from the brain and heart and eye and tongue: the instruments which it uses? For, if so, you will see better what the Bible means by a man's soul as distinguished from his body. You will see better that this self which you call "I" is the real man, the man in the centre of his being, the man as he lives beneath the eye of God and enters into relations with God—the man for whom the Bible announces that exciting adventure in the long ages of the Hereafter. And as you think how he has survived the putting away of every part of the body a dozen times over, you find it easier to understand the revelation of Christ that he will survive the final putting away of the whole body at death.

Now call up before you the face of your

departed one, and then grip with both hands the fact that this life as he knew it is but one stage in God's progressive life-plan for him. And not the first stage either. Already he has had his pre-natal life, "where the bones did grow in the womb of her that was with child." That was his first life. From that dull, lower existence he passed through a great crisis into the higher life of earth with its new educative experiences. That, too, was but a preparatory stage, the kindergarten stage, the caterpillar stage, of his career. And what we call death, the end of this earth career, is revealed to us in Scripture as birth into a new and more exciting career stretching away into the far future, age after age, æon after æon, whose prospect should stir the very blood within us. God only knows how many stages there are still before we reach "unto the stature of the full-grown man, even unto the stature of the fulness of Christ."

There is nothing which so touches some of us as a thing with "makings" in it, a thing with untold potentialities in it, a thing which may come in the future to God alone knows what. Talk of the caterpillar which is to develop into the butterfly, or the acorn which shall one day be a mighty oak! Why, these miracles are but child's play compared with

the miracles potentially wrapped up in this mysterious self. No wildest fairy-tale can suggest the wonder of man's possibilities as he passes out into the new adventure of the life beyond.

Death is the appointed gateway into that life beyond—the only way in. And we are horribly afraid of it. I suppose it is only natural that we should shrink from being launched against our will into the Unknown. I suppose, if we had had intelligence enough to think about it, we should have been equally afraid of being launched, at the crisis of birth, into this unknown world where we are now.

And yet, ought we to be so afraid of death? Has not Christ revealed to us that this terrible thing that we so fear for him who is gone really only means that at the close of this poor limited kindergarten stage of his history Death has come—God's beneficient angel—to lead him into the next stage of being? Why should we be afraid? Birth gave him much, death will give much more. FOR DEATH MEANS BIRTH INTO A FULLER LIFE. What a fright he gives us, this good angel of God! We do not trust his Master much.

Do you say that you do not know what is

before your friend—that it is a "leap off into the dark"? Have we not learned from Scripture that it is much less of "dark" than some of us thought? And may it not be much less of a "leap off" than we think—only a closing of the eyes here and an opening of them there? May not the birth into that life be as simple as the birth into this? May not our fright be like that of Don Quixote when blindfolded he hung by his wrist from the stable window and they told him that a tremendous abyss yawned beneath him? He is in terror of the awful fall. Maritornes cuts the thong with gladsome laughter, and the gallant gentleman falls—just four inches! May we not believe that God reserves just as blithesome a surprise for us when our time comes to discover the simplicity, the agreeableness, the absence of any serious change in what we call dying?[1]

We have all noticed that expression of composed calm which comes on the faces of the newly dead. Some say it is due to muscular relaxation. Perhaps so. But perhaps not. One likes to think it may be something more. Who knows that it may not be a last message of content and acquiescence from those de-

[1] I have here freely adapted some phrases from Edwin Arnold, "Death and Afterwards."

parting souls who at the moment of departure know perhaps a little more than ourselves—a message of good cheer and pleasant promise by no means to be disregarded?

Let us now try to catch some of those passing glimpses which the Bible gives us through the mysterious gateway of death, where our departed one has gone on his mysterious journey into the strange new land. From the nature of the case we must not expect much. In the first place, in our present imperfect, limited condition, with senses fitted only for this poor earthly life, it would probably be impossible to teach us much about the higher life of the spirit world. How can you teach a blind, deaf man about this world of beautiful sights and sounds in which you are living? How could God teach us definite details about a life which no experience of ours can help us to imagine? And, besides that, Scripture is intended to guide our conduct in this world, not to gratify our speculations about another world. Yet there is more revealed than people think.

First, watch our Lord draw the curtain a little in His story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The "story," I say, not the "para-

ble." It is no parable. A parable is the statement of an analogy between visible things and invisible. This is a direct statement about the invisible things themselves. Jesus is telling what happens after death.

Their friends had followed these men to the grave, and could go no farther. Jesus follows them in thought into the life beyond the gateway. His story is not at all intended as a revelation of that life. It is simply a passing reference to it in warning against selfishness. But it lifts the curtain a little bit. Clearly He is speaking not of the far hereafter, but of the unseen life of to-day, running on side by side with this earthly life. For you see the men referred to are not long dead. Dives' brothers are still living here. Dives is quite conscious that the ordinary life of men on earth is still going on. Jesus is telling of the life in which our departed ones are living to-day. And, though His purpose be not any definite teaching about it, yet surely He would not misrepresent it.

First, then, I notice that that life in its inmost experiences seems very like this life, and follows from it quite naturally. He depicts it as a clear, conscious life. They are not dead nor asleep nor unconscious. They are very much alive. He represents them as

thinking and speaking and feeling. Lazarus is feeling "comforted." Dives is feeling "tormented," and is thinking keenly of his own misery and of his brothers' danger on earth at that moment. So actively alive are they all to him that he wants one of them to go back to earth to tell his brothers about it.

Next I learn that each feels himself the same continuous "I" that he was on earth. Lazarus feels himself the same Lazarus, Dives feels himself the same Dives, the brother of those five boys.

Then I read on Christ's authority that there is no break in memory. Of course there could not be if I am still "I." But our Lord confirms this. Lazarus remembers Dives. Dives remembers Lazarus so well that he wants him to go back to convert his brothers. Ay, he remembers the brothers in the old Jerusalem home, the five boys that grew up beside him. He remembers sorrowfully that they have grown to be selfish men like himself, perhaps through his fault. He is thinking about them and troubling about them. And Abraham assumes this memory as a matter of course. "My son, remember that thou in thy lifetime . . ."

I read on, "Now he is comforted and thou art tormented." That again is just what I

should expect. As the curtain rises we get a glimpse of him, away in the dim distance amid the solitudes of great spaces, a little shrivelled soul in the infinite loneliness. And in torment. For conscience is awake now that has slept through the years when he "lived sumptuously every day." The jar of death has awakened it. It is all quite natural. If "I" am still the same "I" in full, vivid, conscious life, in full memory of the past—if I have passed out of the mists of earth into the full light of the Eternal, where everything is seen at its full value, where money counts for nothing and love counts for everything, it is of course natural that the good man should feel comforted and the bad man should feel tormented.

In the expression "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom," I think we have our Lord's indication that the poor soul does not go out solitary into a great lone land. Perhaps we have a suggestion also that Dives was the better for the discipline of that new life. Instead of the selfishness of his life on earth, we have now, amid all his own trouble, anxiety for the welfare of his five brothers on earth. But I am not concerned here with that. I am looking only for indications of a conscious life beyond death's gateway.

We get another glimpse of that life in the story of the Transfiguration, when Moses and Elias come out from that life to meet the Lord and to speak with Him "of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 31). Does it not suggest at once the deep interest which they and their comrades, the great souls within the veil, were taking in the mighty scheme of Redemption that was being worked out on earth? Does it not suggest that those in the spirit land are watching our doings here? Does it not help us to anticipate the joy in that wondrous life when, straight from the cross, Christ the triumphant victor "descended into Hades" (Apostles' Creed) to proclaim the glad news to the dead (I Peter iv. 18); to unfurl His banner and set up His cross in the great world of the departed?

Our next hint comes when the Lord is dying on the cross. The penitent thief is hanging beside Him. Death is drawing near. The poor sinner is about to take the leap off into the dark. He does not know what is before him: darkness—unconsciousness—nothingness—what? He does not know. The only one on earth who does know is on a cross beside him. "LORD, REMEMBER ME WHEN THOU COMEST INTO THY KINGDOM." And

Jesus said: "To-day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." Not in Heaven, but in Paradise—the Jews' word for the resting-place of good men after death. Now, when one man says to another at such a time, "To-day you shall be with me," surely it suggests "To-night, when our dead bodies are hanging on the cross, you and I will be living a full, conscious life, and you will remember our acquaintance here upon the earth; we shall know each other as the two who hung together this morning on Calvary."

Only three hours later the Lord passed in Himself into that Unseen Land where the poor thief had gone before Him. "Put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit," St. Peter tells us, He went in to proclaim good tidings to them that were dead (I Peter iii. 18, 19; iv. 18). Surely these must have been alive and conscious. This journey of Jesus was a most prominent teaching in the early Church and has been embodied as an article of the Christian faith: "He descended into Hades."

I am not discussing any of those questions here. I am but offering you a few hints from Scripture that your departed have only moved on into a new stage of conscious life and adventure.

In the next chapter I mean to follow out more fully the teaching of Scripture as to the life beyond death's dark gateway. I shall try to distinguish between those who have died in Christ's faith and fear and those of whom we dare not speak with any such confidence.

Here I confine myself to the common thought embodied in the heathenish symbol in our cemeteries, a broken pillar on a young man's grave to indicate a life broken off incomplete. It is false! It is heathenish!

Nay, the brave young life that you loved on earth is not ended, but moved on to develop in other and nobler ways. I am not speaking lightly of this. My own eldest boy is gone out into that life, and it never occurs to me to think of his life as ended, or to leave him out of my thoughts or prayers any more than when he was here. Keep your boy always in your thoughts and prayers.

"He is not dead, the child of your affection,
But gone into that school
Where he no longer needs your poor protection,
And Christ Himself doth rule."

Think of your boy as serving at one side of the veil, and you at the other—each in the presence of Christ. Think how he is being lovingly trained and disciplined; how all his

abilities are being used in self-sacrificing deeds for others. Not in a glorified selfishness, in thanking God that he is safe, though his brethren be lost. Ah, no! But in perfect self-sacrifice, even as his Lord. Think of him as learning to fight for righteousness, to help the weak, ay, mayhap, to go out—God's brave young knight—into the darkness after some one who has missed Christ on earth. Realise that, and your whole life must perforce grow nobler. And realise that you will not have to wait for the Resurrection or the Advent to meet him and learn all.

When your death comes he will be waiting for you. He has been praying and watching over you. He will tell you of all that has been happening. And together in Christ's loving presence you will work and wait and help your brethren and look forward to the Heaven that is still in the future.

Thank God for the blessed doctrine of the Paradise Life and for all His poor penitent servants departed this life in His faith and fear.

WE have been trying to study the meaning of death, trying with dim eyes to peer through its dark gateway. But we must not delay at death. Death is a very small thing in comparison with what comes after it—that wonderful, wonderful, wonderful world into which death ushers us. Turn away from the face of your dead. Turn away from the house of clay which held him an hour ago. The house is empty, the tenant is gone. He is away already, gasping in the unutterable wonder of the new experience.

> "O change! stupendous change!
> There lies the soulless clod.
> The light eternal breaks,
> The new immortal wakes,
> Wakes with his God!"

Oh, the wonder of it to him at first! Years ago I met with a story in a sermon by Canon Liddon. An old Indian officer was telling of his battles—of the Indian Mutiny, of the most striking events in his professional career;

and as he vividly described the skirmishes and battles and sieges and hair-breadth escapes, his audience hung breathless in sympathy and excitement. At last he paused; and to their expressions of wonderment he quietly replied, "I expect to see something much more wonderful than that." As he was over seventy, and retired from the service, his listeners looked up into his face with surprise. There was a pause; and then he said, in a solemn undertone, "I mean in the first five minutes after death."

That story caught on to me instantly. That has been for years my closest feeling. I feel it at every death-bed as the soul passes through. I believe it will be my strongest feeling when my own death-hour comes—eager, intense, glad curiosity about the new, strange world opening before me.

As soon as we try to peer further into the vista beyond we are up against a difficulty. Our thoughts must be confused unless at starting we make a clear distinction between:

(i) Those who have died in the fear and love of God; and

(ii) Those for whom we are afraid.

Here we shall assume that our departed one

died in Christ's faith and fear. Later we shall think of the others.

What can we know about him? We can know little or nothing about his outward environment. Even if we were told in words, we have no experience to help us in realising it.

Imagine yourself trying to tell a blind, deaf man about the lovely sunset or the music of the birds. We, shut up in these human bodies, are the blind, deaf men in God's glorious universe. Some of our comrades have moved into the new life beyond, where the eyes of the blind are opened and the ears of the deaf are unstopped. But we have no power of even imagining what their wondrous experience is like.

I suppose that is the reason why we have no description of Paradise or Heaven except in earthly imagery of golden streets and gates of pearl. I suppose that is why St. Paul could not utter what he saw when in some trance condition he was caught up into Paradise. I suppose, too, that was why Lazarus could tell nothing of his marvellous four days in the Unseen.

Be content, then, with what you can know. Don't cry for the moon. Follow your de-

parted in thought and realise what Scripture teaches you about him.

What are we taught about him?

First that IT IS A VIVID, CONSCIOUS life into which he has gone.

There are some passages in Scripture which speak of death as sleep, and which taken alone might suggest a long unconsciousness, a sort of Rip Van Winkle life, sleeping for thousands of years and waking up in a moment at the Judgment Day, feeling as if there had been no interval between. But a little thought will show it is a mere figure of speech taken from the sleeping appearance of the body. "The sleep of death" is a very natural expression to use as one looks on the calm, peaceful face after life's fitful fever and the long pain and sickness of the death-bed. But no one can study the Bible references to the life beyond without seeing that it cannot be a life of sleep or unconsciousness. "Shall we sleep between death and the judgment?" asks Tertullian. "Why, souls do not sleep even when men are alive. It is the province of bodies to sleep." This sleep theory has always been condemned whenever the Church has pronounced on it. Even the Reformers declare it at variance with Holy Scripture, in

spite of the strong feeling in its favour in their day.[1]

You who have followed thus far need no proof as to the teaching of Scripture that the Waiting Life before the Judgment into which your dear ones have gone is no unconscious sleep, but a real, vivid, conscious life. So vivid that our Lord's Spirit is said to have been quickened, made more alive, as He passed in. So vivid that the men of the old world could listen to His preaching. So vivid that Moses and Elias—those eager, impetuous leaders—in that wondrous life could not be held by its bonds, but broke through to stand on the mountain with Christ a thousand years after their death. So vivid that Lazarus (whom our Lord describes as in Abraham's bosom) is depicted as living a full, clear, intelligent life, and Dives as thinking anxiously about his five brothers on earth.

That was surely no unconscious life which St. Paul saw when he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable things, nor was it a blank unconsciousness that he looked

[1] The "39 Articles" were originally 42, and the 40th ran: "They which say that the souls of those who depart hence do sleep, being without all sense, feeling, or perceiving till the Day of Judgment, . . . do utterly dissent from the right belief declared to us in Holy Scripture."

for in his desire "to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. i. 23).

Or glance again at the story of our Lord and the thief on the cross. "To-day," said Jesus, "thou shalt be with Me." To-night, when our dead bodies are hanging upon the cross, you and I will be together. Which surely means we shall be conscious of each other as the two who hung dying together on Calvary.

Beyond all question God has revealed to you plainly enough that your beloved has gone into a full, vivid, conscious life. He is more alive to-day than he ever was on earth.

What follows? This. If I am fully conscious, what am I conscious of? Surely, first of all I must be conscious of myself, conscious of the continuity of my personal identity, conscious of the continuity of my personal character. I must feel that I am the same "I," I am still "myself." You remember what our Lord said from the other side of the grave; "Handle Me and see it is I MYSELF."

It is I myself, the very same self. It is they themselves, the very same selves whom I loved and who loved me so dearly. In that solemn hour after death, believe it, your boy,

your wife, your husband, who is experiencing the startling revelations of the new life, is feeling that life as an unbroken continuance of the life begun on earth. Only the environment is changed. He feels himself the same boy or man that he was an hour ago, with the same character, aspirations, desires, the same love and courage and hope. But oh, with what a different view of all things! How clearly he recognises God's love and holiness! How clearly he sees himself—his whole past life! If ever he cared for Christ and His will, how longingly, wonderingly, he is reaching out to Him! If ever he loved you tenderly on earth, how deeply and tenderly he is loving you to-day!

What else have you learned? That HE REMEMBERS CLEARLY the old life and the old home and the old comrades and the old scenes on earth. There is no conjecturing about that. That goes without saying if "I" am the same "I" in that world. Personal identity of course postulates memory which binds into one the old life and the new. And the Bible takes that for granted. We saw that Lazarus remembered Dives, and that Dives remembered Lazarus and remembered his old home and the five young brothers who grew up with

him. He remembers that they have grown to be selfish men like himself, and is troubled for them. And Abraham assumes it as a matter of course: "My son, remember that thou in thy lifetime," etc. Our Lord comes back from death remembering all the past as if death made no chasm at all in His memory. "Go and meet Me in Galilee," He says. "Lo, I have told you" (before I died). The redeemed in the future life are represented as remembering and praising God who had redeemed them from their sins on earth.

So you may be quite sure that your dear one is remembering you and storing up in his memory all your love in the past.

And he has taken with him all the treasures of mind and soul which by God's grace he has won for himself on earth. A man can take nothing of the external things—of gold or lands. Nothing of what he HAS, but all of what he IS—all that he has gained IN HIMSELF. The treasures of memory, of disciplined powers, of enlarged capacities, of a pure and loving heart. All the enrichment of the mind by study, all the love of man, all the love of God, all the ennobling of character which has come through the struggle after right and duty. These are the true treasures

which go on with us into that land where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt.

And he is "WITH CHRIST."

The Bible teaches that the faithful who have died in Christ are happy and blest in Paradise, even though the Final Heaven and the Beatific Vision are still but things to be longed for far off in the future. Lazarus is "comforted" after his hard life on earth. "The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God; there shall no torment touch them." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord . . . they rest from their labours." But, best of all, it assures us that they are WITH CHRIST. "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," the dying Stephen prayed as he was passing into the Unseen. They are "absent from the body," says St. Paul, "at home with the Lord." They "depart to be with Christ, which is far better."

"With Christ." One has to write carefully here. The full vision of the divine glory and goodness and love is reserved for the final stage of existence in Heaven, where nothing that defileth shall enter in, whereas this Intermediate Life is one with many imperfections and faults, quite unready for that vision of glory. But, for all that, St. Paul believed that

the presence of Christ was vouchsafed in that Waiting Land, in some such way, we may suppose, as on earth long ago. Only an imperfect revelation of the Son of God. And yet—and yet—oh, how one longs for it! Think of being near Him, even in some such relation as were the disciples long ago!

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How He called little children as lambs to His fold,
I should like to have been with Him then!"

Yes, St. Paul seems to say, you shall be with Him, you shall have that longing gratified in some measure even before you go to Heaven. So that Paradise, poor and imperfect as it is compared with the Heaven beyond, is surely a state to be greatly desired.

I can imagine some mourner shrinking from the thought that Paradise, into which his dear one has gone, is not the final Heaven. Nay, shrink not. Paradise means the Park of God, the Garden of God, the place of rest and peace and refreshing shade. The park is not the palace, but it is the precincts of the palace. Paradise is not Heaven, but it is the courtyard of Heaven. And (the dearest, tenderest assurance of all) they are with Christ. Is not that sufficient answer to many questions? At any rate the Bible definitely teaches that.

VI *The Communion of Saints*

SHALL WE KNOW ONE ANOTHER IN THAT LIFE? Why not? As George Macdonald somewhere pertinently asks, "Shall we be greater fools in Paradise than we are here?"

This is a perfectly apt retort, and not at all flippant, as it may seem at first. It is based on the belief suggested by common sense and confirmed by Scripture that our life there will be the natural continuous development of our life here, and not some utterly unconnected existence. If consciousness, personal identity, character, love, memory, fellowship, intercourse go on in that life, why should there be a question raised about knowing one another?

If I am the same "I," the same person, still alive, still conscious, still thinking, still remembering, still loving, still longing for my dear ones, still capable of intercourse with others, why may I not without definite proof assume the fact of recognition? Surely it should require strong evidence to make me

believe the contrary. It is one thing to avoid reckless assertions without any foundation, it is quite another thing to have so little trust in God that we are afraid to make a fair inference such as we would unhesitatingly make in like conditions here—just because it seems to us "too good to be true." Nothing is too good to be true where God is concerned.

Why, even if the Bible were to give you no hint of it, do you not see that the deepest, noblest instincts that God has implanted in us cry out for recognition of our departed? and where God is concerned it is not too much to say that the deepest, noblest instincts are, in a sense, prophecies. This passionate affection, the noblest thing that God has implanted in us, makes it impossible to believe that we should be but solitary, isolated spirits amongst a crowd of others whom we did not know—that we should live in the society of happy souls hereafter and never know that the spirit next us was that of a mother or husband or friend or child. We know that the Paradise and earth lives come from the same God, who is the same always. Into this life He never sends us alone. There is the mother's love waiting and the family affection around us; and, as we grow older, love and friendship

and association with others are one of the great needs and pleasures of life, and one of the chief means of training the higher side of us. Unless His method changes we may surely hope that He will do something similar hereafter, for love is the plant that must overtop all others in the whole Kingdom of God.

Again, love and friendship must be LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP FOR SOME ONE. If we do not know any one, then we cannot love, and human love must die without an object. But the Bible makes it a main essential of the religious life that "he that loveth God loveth his brother also."

If we shall not know one another, why then this undying memory of departed ones, this aching void that is never filled on earth? Alas for us! for we are worse off than the lower animals. The calf is taken from the cow, the kittens are taken from their mother, and in a few days they are forgotten. But the poor human mother never forgets. When her head is bowed with age, when she has forgotten nearly all else on earth, you can bring the tears into her eyes by speaking of the child that died in her arms forty years ago. Will God disappoint that tender love, that one supreme thing which is "the most like God within the soul"?

There can be no real reason, I repeat, for doubting the fact of recognition, unless the Bible should distinctly state the contrary. And, so far from doing this, the Bible, in its very few references to the hereafter life, always seems to assume the fact, and never in any way contradicts it.

Notice first the curiously persistent formula in which Old Testament chroniclers speak of death. "He died in a good old age and was gathered unto his people, and they buried him." "Gathered unto his people" can hardly mean burial with his people, for the burial is mentioned after it. It comes between the dying and the burial. And I note that even at Moses' burial on the lone mountain-top this phrase is solemnly used: "The Lord said unto him, Get thee up into the mount, and die in the mount, AND BE GATHERED TO THY PEOPLE." Miriam was buried in the distant desert, Aaron's body lay on the slopes of Mount Hor, and the wise little mother who made the ark of bulrushes long ago had found a grave, I suppose, in the brick-fields of Egypt. Did it not mean that he came back to them all in the Life Unseen when he was "gathered to his people"?

David seemed to think that he would know

his dead child: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

Our Lord assumes that Dives and Lazarus knew each other. And in another passage He uses a very homely illustration of a friendly gathering when He speaks of those who shall "sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom." And again, in His advice about the right use of riches: "Make to yourselves friends by the means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye die they may receive you into the everlasting habitations" (Luke xvi. 9). Surely that at least suggests recognition and a pleasant welcoming on the other side. I remember well how, in the pain of a great bereavement, His words to the penitent thief came into my life like a message from the Beyond: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." If anybody knew, surely Jesus knew. If His words meant anything, surely they meant we shall be conscious of each other, we shall know each other as did the two friendless ones who hung on the cross together.

Then I see St. Paul (though he is referring to the later stage of existence) comforting bereaved mourners with the thought of meeting those whom Christ shall bring with Him. Where would be the comfort of it if they

should not know them? He expects to meet his converts and present them to Christ. How could he say this if he thought he would not know them?

I wonder if anybody really doubts it after all. Just think of it! With Christ in Paradise, and not knowing or loving any comrade soul! Is that possible in the land of love? With our dear ones in Paradise, and never a thrill of recognition as we touch in spiritual intercourse the mother, or wife, or husband, or child for whose presence we are longing! Cannot you imagine our wondering joy when our questionings are set at rest? Cannot you imagine the Lord in His tender reproach, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

When a mother asks how she can know him who died as a child twenty years ago, one feels that recognition must be something spiritual and not depending on visible shape. Even here on earth much of our recognition is spiritual. Soul recognises soul. We recognise in some degree good and evil character of souls even through the coarse covering of the body. We instinctively, as we say, trust or distrust people on first appearance. Or, again, a slight young stripling goes away to

India and returns in twenty years a big, bearded, broad-shouldered man, with practically no outward resemblance to the boy that went away. But even though he strive to conceal his identity he cannot hide it long from his mother. She looks into his eyes and her soul leaps out to him. Call it instinct, insight, intuition, sympathy—what you please—it is the spiritual vision, soul recognising soul. If that spiritual vision apart from bodily shape plays so great a part in recognition here, may it not be all-sufficient there? In that life where there is consciousness, character, memory, love, longing for our dear ones, and power of communication, is it conceivable that we should have intercourse with our loved and longed-for, without any thrill of recognition? Surely not. Instinctively we shall know.

> **"It was not, mother, that I knew thy face—**
> **It was my heart that cried out Mother!"**

But I think there is even a more probable answer: That it is not you who will have to do the recognising; at any rate that you will not be the first with it. If it be true, as we have reason to believe, that your dear one there watches your life on earth, of course he would know you at once. While, year by year, you have been changing from youth to

old age he has been near you. He knows you as familiarly as if he had been on earth beside you. And whatever change has passed on him in his new life, surely he too will be easier to recognise when he has claimed you first.

We pass on to consider the relations between ourselves and our departed ones. Do they knew now of our life on earth? Can there be between us comradeship in any sense? Can there be love and care and sympathy and prayer between us on these two sides of the grave, as there is between friends on earth on the two sides of the Atlantic.

The Church says yes, and calls it in her Creed the Communion of Saints. The Communion of Saints—a very grand name, but it means only a very simple thing—just loving sympathy between us and these elder brothers and sisters beyond the grave.

You see that it is a prominent doctrine of the Church's Creed, and, rightly understood, it is a very beautiful and touching doctrine—not only because of the union of fellowship with our departed, but especially because the bond of that union and fellowship is our dear Lord Himself, whom we and they alike love and thank and praise and pray to and wor-

ship, and from whom we and they alike derive the Divine sustenance of our souls.

Yes, you say, that is a beautiful thought. But is that all? My poor heart is craving for more communion than that. Do they know or care about my love and sorrow to-day? And are they helping me? Are they praying for me to that dear Lord whom we both love —in whose presence we both stand to-day? And can I do anything for them on my side in this "Communion of Saints"?

Do they pray for us or help us in any way? Does any one need to ask that question?

Since they are with Christ, of course they pray. The world to come is the very atmosphere of prayer. St. John in his vision tells of "the offering of the golden vials full of odours which are the prayers of the saints" (Rev. v. 8). And again, three chapters later, the angel stood to offer the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar.

Can you imagine your mother, who never went to bed here without earnest prayer for her boy, going into that life with full consciousness and full memory of the dear old home on earth, and never a prayer for her boy rising to the altar of God?

Why, even the selfish Dives, after death, could not help praying for his brothers!

Ay, she is praying for you. I think amongst the most precious prayers before the golden altar are the mother's prayers for her boy who is left behind on earth.

But, you say, She does not know anything about my life or my needs on earth. Even if she did not know, she would surely pray for you. But I am pretty sure that she does know. There are several hints in Scripture to suggest that she does know—hints so strong that if you are doing anything now that she would like, I should advise you to keep on doing it, and if you are doing anything now that you would not wish her to know, I would advise you to stop doing it.

Our Lord represents Abraham as knowing all about Moses and the prophets, who came a thousand years after his time (Luke xvi. 29).

Our Lord distinctly tells the Jews that Abraham in that life knew all about His mission on earth. "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John viii. 56).

At the Transfiguration, too, Moses and Elias came out from that Waiting Life to speak with Christ of His decease which He

should accomplish at Jerusalem. Does it not suggest at once that they and their great comrades within the veil were watching eagerly and knowing all about the life of Christ and the great crisis of man's redemption toward which they had been working on earth long years ago?

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews apparently believed that our departed ones were watching our course, for after a long list of the great departed heroes of faith in olden time he writes to encourage us in the race on earth: "Seeing that we are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. xii.).

But, somebody says, she might not be quite happy if she knew all that her children had to go through. Seeing that at any rate she remembers them, do you think she would be more happy if she knew that they might have to go through troubles of which she could not learn anything? Put yourself in the place of any mother that you know, and ask if it would make her any happier to stop all letters about her children who she felt might be in danger or trouble. Are you quite sure that in that

spirit life a peaceful contentment like that of the cow who forgets her calf is the highest thing to be desired? The higher any soul grows on earth the less can it escape unselfish sorrow for the sake of others. Must it not be so in that land also? Surely the Highest Himself must have more sorrow than any one else for the sins and troubles of men. Have you ever thought of that "eternal pain" of God? If there be joy in His presence over one sinner that repenteth, must there not be pain in His presence over one that repenteth not?

There are surely higher things in God's plans for His saints than mere selfish happiness and content. There is the blessedness that comes of sympathy with Him over human sorrow or pain. We but degrade that thought of the blessedness of the redeemed when we desire that they should escape that.

And always remember for your comfort that in that kindly world so interested in our world she knows that her Lord is caring about your future even more than she is. It is a strong confirmation of this belief when I find it the belief of the great bishops and teachers of the early Church in its purest and most lov-

ing days, the days nearest to those of Christ and His apostles.

St. Cyprian, the martyr bishop of Carthage, who was born in the century after St. John's death (A.D. 200), made an agreement with his friend Cornelius that whichever of them died first should in the Unseen Land remember in prayer him who was left behind.

St. Gregory Nazianzen is preaching the funeral sermon of St. Basil. "He still prays for the people," he says, "for he did not so leave us as to have left us altogether." And in his funeral sermon over his own father: "I am satisfied that he accomplishes there now by his prayers more than he ever did by his teaching, just in proportion as he approaches nearer to God after having shaken off the fetters of his body."

I could give you long lists of references of this kind showing the belief of the early Church.

But sympathy and prayer must not be on one side only. It must be mutual in the Communion of Saints—they remembering and loving and thinking about us, we remembering and loving and thinking about them; they asking from their Lord blessing for us, we asking from Him blessing for them. For

surely they are not above wanting His blessing still—not even the best of them: though safe with Him, though forgiven their sins, they are still imperfect, still needing to grow in grace, in purification, in fitness for the Final Heaven by and by. And we can help their growth as they can help ours.

I think we should all be happier and better, I think the Unseen World would come back more clearly on our horizon, if we kept our dear ones in our prayers as we used to do before they died. Do not keep any hidden chambers in your heart shut out from Christ. Bring your dear departed ones to Him as you bring all else to Him. He knows what is best for them. Pray only for that. Pray "Lord, help them to grow closer to Thee. Help them, if it may be, to help others, and make them happy in Thy great kingdom until we meet again." Pray something like that. Oh, how can you help doing it, if you love them and believe in prayer!

"How can I cease to pray for thee? Somewhere
In God's wide universe thou art to-day.
Can He not reach thee with His tender care?
Can He not hear me when for thee I pray?
Somewhere thou livest and hast need of Him,
Somewhere thy soul sees higher heights to climb,
And somewhere, too, there may be valleys dim
Which thou must pass to reach the heights sublime.

Then all the more because thou canst not hear
Poor human words of blessing will I pray.
O true, brave heart, God bless thee, whereso'er
In God's wide universe thou art to-day!"

For those who desire such I suggest this prayer:

O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, in whose embrace all creatures live in whatsoever world or condition they be; I beseech Thee for him *whose name and dwelling place and every need thou knowest.*

Lord, vouchsafe him *light and peace and joy and consolation in Paradise in the companionship of saints, in the presence of Christ, in the ample folds of Thy great love.*

If in aught I can minister to his *peace, be pleased of Thy love to let this be; and mercifully keep me from every act which might deprive me of the sight of* him *or mar the fulness of our joy together, when the end of days hath come. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

There is very much more to learn if there were space for it here. Hints as to growth and purification in that life. Hints as to unselfish ministry for others. Questions as to the Judgment and the Far Hereafter and what men ought to believe about Heaven and Hell. But probably I have said enough to set you thinking and, I hope, to set you studying the subject for yourselves.

VII

"For the Love of God Is Broader—"

UP to this we have been ignoring a large proportion of those who have died. To avoid misunderstanding we have kept in view those only of whom we had hopes that they died in the fear and love of God. But there is no evading the thought that between these and the utterly reprobate there are many who belong to neither class—mixed characters in all varying degrees of good or evil. Of many of them it could be said that those who knew them best saw much that was good and lovable in them. But it could not be said that they had consciously and definitely chosen for Christ.

They must form the majority of those who die. Therefore one cannot help wondering about them. One day death overtook them. The thought of them comes forcibly when some morning the newspapers startle us with the story of an awful carnage in which thousands have passed out of life in a moment, and the horror of the catastrophe is deepened by the

thought that they have been called away suddenly, unprepared.

What of their position in the Life Beyond? Our Christian charity prompts us to hope the best for them, all the more because they have died fighting bravely for their country. But are we justified in hoping? It is impossible for thoughtful, sympathetic men to evade that question. It is cowardly to evade it. At any rate, in thinking of the World of the Departed, we can hardly pass over altogether the thought of the majority, and it cannot be wrong for us to think about them humbly and reverently.

First, I point out to you the solemn responsibility of this earth life, in which Acts make Habits, and Habits make Character, and Character makes Destiny. I am about to point out that in a very real sense this life is the probation time for man. But this does not close the question of the poor bereaved mother weeping for her dead son: "If any soul has not in penitence and faith definitely accepted Jesus Christ in this life, is it for ever impossible that he may do so in any other life?"

I answer unhesitatingly, God forbid! else what of all the dead children down through the ages, and all the dead idiots, and all the

millions of dead heathen, and all the poor sinners in Christian lands who in their dreary, dingy lives had never any fair chance of knowing their Lord in a way that would lead them to love Him, and who have never even thought about accepting or rejecting Him? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Shall not the loving Father do His best for all? Our Lord knew that if the mighty works done in Capernaum had been done in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented. Does He not there suggest that He would take thought for those men of Tyre and Sidon in the Unseen Land? Does He not know the same of many gone into that Unseen Life from heathen lands and Christian lands, who would have loved Him if they knew Him as He really is, and who have but begun to know Him in the world of the dead—of many who in their ignorance have tried to respond to the dim light of Conscience within, and only learned within the veil really to know Him, the Lord of the Conscience, "the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John i. 9).

Here is no question of encouraging godless men with the hope of a new probation. Here is no question of men wilfully rejecting Christ. The merry, thoughtless child—the imbecile—

the heathen—had no thought of rejecting Christ. The poor sinner in Christian lands brought up in evil surroundings, who, though he had heard of Christ, yet saw no trace of Christ in his dreary life, cannot be said to have rejected Christ. The honest sceptic, who in the last generation had been taught as a prominent truth of Christianity that God decrees certain men to Eternal Heaven and certain men to Eternal Hell, not for any good or evil they have done, but to show His power and glory, and who had therefore in obedience to conscience frankly rejected Christianity—can he be said to have rejected Christ?

The possibility in this life of putting oneself outside the pale of salvation is quite awful enough, without our making it worse. It is not for us to judge who is outside the pale of salvation, nor to limit the love of God by our little shibboleths. It is on a man's WILL, not on his knowledge or ignorance, that destiny depends. God only can judge that. All the subtle influences which go to make character are known to Him alone. He alone can weigh the responsibility of the will in any particular case. And surely we know Him well enough humbly to trust His love to the uttermost for every soul whom He has created.

But this hope must not ignore the solemn thought that in a very real sense the probation of this life seems the determining factor in human destiny—even for the unthinking, even for the ignorant—nay, even for the heathen who could never have heard of Christ here. Rightly understood, all that I have said does not conflict with this. It may seem strange at first sight to think of the heathen as having any real probation here. Yet, mark it well, it is of this heathen man who could not consciously have known Christ in this life that St. Paul implies that his attitude in the Unseen Life toward Him who is the Light of the world is determined by his attitude in this life towards the imperfect light of conscience that he has: "If the Gentiles who have not the law do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law are a law unto themselves, which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness" (Rom. ii. 14).

We may assume that St. Paul means that the heathen man who in this life followed the dim light of his conscience is the man who will rejoice in the full light when it comes, and that the man who has been wilfully shutting out that dim light of conscience here is thereby rendering himself less capable of ac-

cepting the fuller light when he meets it hereafter. In other words, this life is his probation—he is forming on earth the moral bent of his future life.

We may assume the same of men in similar conditions in Christian lands, men brought up amid ignorance and crime, men brought up in infidel homes, men to whom Christ had been so unattractively presented that they saw no beauty in Him, men who in the squalid monotony of the struggle for bread had little to make them think of Christ at all. They all have the light of God in some degree, and, by their attitude towards the right that they know, are determining on earth their attitude towards God in the Hereafter. . . . They are forming character, and *character tends to permanence.*

The "outer darkness," it would seem, comes not from absence of light, but from blindness of sight. The joy of Heaven is impossible to the unholy, just as is the joy of beautiful scenery to the blind or the joy of exquisite music to the deaf. Probation in this life simply means that in this first stage of his being a man either is or is not blinding his eyes and dulling his ears and hardening his heart so as to make himself less capable of higher things in the life to come.

If, then, it be possible even for a heathen to have in this life sufficient probation to determine his attitude towards God for ever, how much more for a man in the full light of Christianity? In view of this the great law of life, that CHARACTER TENDS TO PERMANENCE, may it not be awfully true that a man who, *with true knowledge of Christ,* wilfully and deliberately turns from Him all through this life, should thus render himself less capable of turning to Him in any other life? *With true knowledge of Christ,* I say, not with knowledge of some repulsive misrepresentation of Christ.

For think what it means to reject Christ wilfully, with true knowledge of Him:

"His voice still comes as we tramp on,
With a sorrowful fall in its pleading tones:
'Thou wilt tire in the dreary ways of sin.
I left My home to bring thee in.
In its golden street are no weary feet,
Its rest is pleasant, its songs are sweet.'
And we shout back angrily, hurrying on
To a terrible home where rest is none:
'We want not Your city's golden street,
Nor to hear its constant song.'
And still Christ keeps on loving us, loving all along.

"Rejected still, He pursues each one:
'My child, what more could thy God have done?
Thy sin hid the light of Heaven from Me
When alone in the darkness I died for thee;

Thy sin of to-day in its shadow lay
Between My face and One turned away.'
And we stop and turn for a moment's space
To fling back that love in the Saviour's face,
To give His heart yet another grief,
And glory in the wrong.
And still Christ keeps on loving us, loving all along."

Is it hard to believe that a man thus knowing Christ and wilfully rejecting Him should thereby risk the ruin of his soul? Can we not recognise this awful law of life: that wilful sin against light tends to darkening of the light—that every rejection of God and good draws blood, as it were, on the spiritual retina—that a life of such rejections of the light tends to make one incapable of receiving the light for ever?

If this be so, it is not at all fair to misrepresent it by saying that God cruelly stereotypes a man's soul at death and will refuse him permission to repent after death, however much he may want to. The voice of the Holy Ghost within tells us that this could never be true of the Father. We must believe that through all eternity, if the worst sinner felt touched by the love of God and wanted to turn to Him, that man would be saved. What we dread is that the man may not want it. We dread not God's will, but the man's own will.

Character tends to permanence. Free will is a glorious but a dangerous prerogative. A human will may so distort itself as to grow incapable of good. Even a character not hardened into permanent evil may grow incapable of the highest good. A soul even forgiven through the mercy of God may "enter into life halt and maimed," like a consumptive patient cured of his disease but going through life with only one lung.

Though the Bible does not give an absolutely definite pronouncement on this question, yet the whole trend of its teaching leads to the belief that this life is our probation time. It everywhere calls for immediate repentance. It warns men of the danger of so rejecting Christ as to render themselves incapable for ever of receiving Him. And this has been the general belief of the Church in all ages. Even in all the hopeful words of the ancient fathers about Christ preaching to the spirits in prison, who in the dark old-world days "had sometime been disobedient," they add some such significant phrase as "that He might convert those *who were capable of turning to Him.*"

And human experience of character tending to permanence makes this fact of human pro-

bation awfully probable. There is nothing in Scripture, nor in its interpretation by the Church, nor in human experience to conflict with the statement that in this life Acts makes Habits, and Habits make Character, and Character makes Destiny.

What new discoveries of God's power and mercy may await us in eternity we cannot know, but from all we do know we are justified in thinking that (in the sense which I have stated) a man's life in this world is the determining factor in his destiny—at any rate that a man who presumes recklessly on chances in the future is taking terrible risks.

Yet we dare offer comfort to anxious mourners grieving over careless and unsatisfactory boys who are gone. We can tell them that God only is the Judge of what constitutes irrevocable rejection of good, that we cannot tell who has irrevocably "done despite to the Spirit of grace," and that the deep love and pain of Christ for sinful man remains for ever and ever. We may tell the poor mother that her deep love and pain for her dead son is but a faint shadow of the deep love and pain of God—that no one will be surprised or trapped in his ignorance—that no one will be lost whom it is possible for

God to save—that no one will be lost until "the heavenly Father has as it were thrown His arms around him and looked him full in the face with the bright eyes of His love, and then of his own deliberate will he would not have Him."

Ay, and more than that we can say. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one born in the Spirit." Let no man limit His holy influence. He is near men and prompting them oftener than we recognise.

How often that thought came to me in the terrible years of the War when I heard of a careless boy as he charged into battle "putting up what he could remember of a little prayer," not for himself, but for the dear old mother at home in case he should die,—when I saw him steadfastly facing death for the sake of duty, or comforting the last moments of a dying friend, how could I help feeling that God was near him? When I read of a man killed because he rushed out amid a hail of bullets to bring in a wounded comrade I knew that such deeds come but through the Spirit of God, and I seemed to hear the voice of Christ who died for men—"Greater love hath

no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."

And so I hope greatly, for I know not how far the loving Spirit of God has gone with that man's soul. I would not make light of life's awful responsibility. I would not have you encourage mere sentimental optimism. But I would say to every poor troubled mother to-day: Christ cares more than you care. Christ will at any rate do for your boy the best that may be done for him. Christ will not forget him. Trust Christ with him.

> "Through all depths of pain and loss
> Sinks the plummet of His Cross;
> Never yet abyss was found
> Deeper than that Cross could sound."

So we leave them in His hands. Where better could we leave them?

So closes our brief glimpse into the adventure of the Hereafter. We have learned very little. "We know not yet what we shall be." But we know that God is good, that the Heavenly Father careth and with hopeful hearts we wait amid that wistful crowd which stands to-day on the Rim of the World looking out over the wall.

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